

Edwards Joins VA Secretary Shinseki to Announce National Call Center Coming to Waco

Facility Will Create 224 Local Jobs & Help Veterans Nationwide Fill Prescriptions

(Washington, D.C.) - U.S. Representative Chet Edwards today joined U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Secretary Eric K. Shinseki to announce that the Waco VA hospital will open a National Pharmacy Contact Center in Waco that will create 224 new full and part-time jobs in the local economy by 2010.

Congressman Edwards said, "I salute Secretary Shinseki for making the decision to open a National Pharmacy Contact Center and to locate it here in Waco. This is a clear statement that the Department of Veterans Affairs sees the Waco VA as a vital resource for veterans throughout Texas and across the nation. Not only will adding a national call center at the Waco VA create local 224 new jobs in tough economic times, the men and women who are employed will know they are giving something back to the veterans who have sacrificed so much for our nation."

Secretary Shinseki said, "I want to thank Congressman Edwards for your devoted support for American Veterans through the years, and for your help in bringing this contact center into being. The new center will be there to answer questions from veterans about their prescriptions, and work with VA facilities so that VA practitioners can address critical issues promptly and safely."

The National Pharmacy Contact Center, which will help Veterans with questions regarding their prescriptions, is part of a Department of Veterans Affairs initiative to improve customer service to Veterans and enhance access to care at VA medical centers. The contract for the \$4.5 million renovation of Building 90 to house the center will begin in September, next month. The first administrative staff of 8-10 people will begin work in less than three months; the training for the next 16 workers will begin in December of this year; and all 224 new employees will be hired by October of 2010. The VA believes that the center will not only enhance customer service for Veterans who call but will also improve accessibility to pharmacy staff at medical centers, who will no longer need to handle these calls.

Edwards continued, "The National Pharmacy Contact Center brings us one step closer to realizing the dream of those of us who fought so hard to keep the Waco VA open-the dream

that this campus one day be fully utilized for the benefit of America's veterans. I believe that dream is coming to reality far faster than any of us might have imagined just a year or two ago. A national center will allow the VA to provide better pharmacy services to veterans at a lower cost to veterans. By selecting Waco, the VA takes advantage of an existing VA facility and a community that has proven for over 70 years its commitment to caring for veterans."

The VA, through its VHA Health Resource Center, operates a contact management center in Topeka, Kansas that provides Veterans information on health benefits and first party billing. The call centers in Waco and Topeka will provide back up support to each other to ensure uninterrupted service in the event of natural disasters or other events that cause service interruptions.

The new call center adds to a growing expansion of services offered by the Waco VA. With the new call center, more than 400 new jobs at the Waco VA have been created since January of 2007. In 2008, Edwards secured \$49 million for construction projects at 5 buildings on the Waco VA campus, which will bring additional jobs to McLennan County. Earlier this year, the Waco VA also received \$7.9 million for several improvement projects funded by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), also known as the stimulus bill.

Edwards is the Chairman of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Military Construction & Veterans Affairs